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THE STATE OF NEWYORKTITLAN:

A SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE OF MEXICAN NEW YORKERS*

by

Francisco L. Rivera-Batiz

Professor of Economics and Education
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, New York 10027
212-678-3152
FLR9@Columbia.edu

and

Visiting Scholar
The Russell Sage Foundation
112 East 64th Street
New York, New York 10021

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research report presents data on the socioeconomic status of the Mexican population residing in New York City using information recently provided by the 2000 U.S. Census of Population. The study concludes that:

(1) Mexicans had the highest rate of population growth of all the major racial and ethnic groups in New York City in the 1990s. The number of Mexican New Yorkers counted by the U.S. Census more than tripled in the 1990s, rising from 61,772 in 1990 to 186,872 in 2000.

(2) Among all cities in the United States, New York is now ranked No. 11 in terms of the size of its Mexican population, ranking close to cities with long-standing Mexican communities, such as San Diego, Santa Ana and San Jose, California.

(3) Mexicans constitute the third largest Hispanic/ Latino population in New York, after Puerto Ricans and Dominicans.

(4) Over 60 percent of all Mexican New Yorkers reside in Queens and Brooklyn. The 2000 Census counted 58,825 Mexicans in Brooklyn and 55,481 in Queens.

(5) The growth of the Mexican population of New York has been fueled by immigration. Of the 186,872 Mexican New Yorkers, 77.6 percent were born outside the United States.

(6) A substantial fraction of these migrants are undocumented workers. Although uncertain by their very nature, Census-based estimates of the number of undocumented Mexican immigrants residing in New York City range from 30,000 to 60,000. This amounts to between 20 and 40 percent of all Mexican immigrants residing in the City.

(7) But it is likely that the population data provided by the Census reflect a serious undercount of the total Mexican population living in New York. Census takers often do not sample the hard-to-reach urban neighborhoods where many recent Mexican immigrants reside. Furthermore, the 186,872 Mexicans counted by the 2000 Census represent persons whose "usual residence" is New York and does not include temporary migrants, who perceive their "usual residence" to be south of the border. The Census does not regard these migrants to be part of the medium-term or long-term resident population of the United States and they are excluded from the Census enumeration. But despite their expectations, many temporary migrants do stay in New York for long periods of time and become long-term residents. If one counts these migrants as part of the population living in New York, the number of Mexicans in the City would rise substantially. Estimates of the total Mexican population living in New York by observers and experts familiar with Mexican New Yorkers range from 275,000 to 300,000, but there are no formal data analyses supporting these numbers.

(8) The place of origin of most Mexican immigrants in New York is the State of Puebla. Estimates are that between 60 and 80 percent of all Mexican migrants in New York City originate in Puebla or in other States in the vicinity of Puebla, including Guerrero, Jalisco, and Michoacan . Most of these migrants come from low-income, rural communities within these States.

(9) The Mexican population of New York has the lowest proportion of women of any major racial and ethnic group in the City. The proportion of women among Mexican New Yorkers is 42.3 %, compared to 52.7% for the overall New York City population. The comparatively low proportion of women among Mexicans is related to the large immigrant component in that population combined with the over-representation of men among Mexican migrants. Among Mexican New Yorkers born outside the United States, only 39.1% are female. By contrast, almost half (49.8%) of all Mexican New Yorkers born in the U.S. are female. A similar pattern is found in a number of other major cities, such as Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston, where the Mexican migrant population also contains a large fraction of men.

(10) Mexican New Yorkers tend to be very young. The median age of the Mexican population in New York City is 24.3 years, compared to 34.4 years for the overall City.

(11) Mexican households are comparatively large by New York City standards. The average number of persons per household among Mexican New Yorkers is 4.6 persons, compared to 2.6 among the overall New York City population and 3.2 for the overall Hispanic/Latino population.

(12) The proportion of Hispanic/Latino families in New York City headed by women is comparatively high, but this is not the case among Mexican New Yorkers. For instance, only 12.4 percent of Mexicans in New York live in female-headed families with no spouse present and with own children under 18 years of age. By contrast, 25.4 percent of the overall Hispanic/Latino population lives in this type of family. Most Mexicans (62.3 percent) live as part of married family households.

(13) The average household income per person of the Mexican population is among the lowest of all the major racial and ethnic groups of New York City. The mean annual household income per-capita of the Mexican population of New York in 1999 was $10,231, which is less than half of that prevailing among the overall New York City population, equal to $22,402 in 1999. It is sharply lower than the average for the White population ($36,800) and for Asian New Yorkers ($18,787), but it is also significantly lower than that for Hispanics/Latinos overall ($12,206) and the Black/African American population ($15,658).

(14) The poverty rate of Mexicans in New York was among the highest in the City in the year 1999. One third (33 percent) of all Mexican New Yorkers had a household income below the poverty line. This compares to 21.2 percent among the overall New York City population, 11.5 percent among White New Yorkers, 25 percent for Black/African Americans, 19.6 percent among Asian New Yorkers and 30.8 percent for Hispanics/Latinos overall.

(15) Although the income per-capita of Mexican New Yorkers is abysmally low by New York City (or United States) standards, the income that Mexican immigrants receive often represents an enormous leap compared to the situation they would have faced in Mexico. Average income per person in the state of Puebla in Mexico is about 40 percent of that for the average Mexican residing in New York City. And in the rural communities of Puebla, where many Mexican New Yorkers originate, the average income per capita often lies below $1,000 per year, which is a small fraction of the average annual income per-capita in New York.

(16) The labor force participation rate of Mexican men is the highest among the major racial and ethnic groups in the City. In 2000, 74 percent of Mexican men aged 16 or older were part of the labor force, compared to 67 percent in the City overall and 64 percent among Hispanic/Latino men.

(17) The labor force participation rate of Mexican women in New York was 45.3 percent in 2000. This is substantially lower than the average for New York City, which was 53.5 percent, and somewhat lower than for the overall Latino/Hispanic population, which was 48.3 percent in 2000. This low labor force participation rate is accounted-for by the large share of immigrants in the Mexican population. Among Mexican women who were born

in the U.S., the labor force participation rate was 56 percent, which is higher than the average for the City. However, for Mexican women born outside the U.S., the labor force participation rate was equal to 42 percent. Still, although the labor force participation rate of female Mexican immigrants is comparatively low by New York City (or U.S.) standards it is substantially higher than that prevailing in the communities where the migrants come from. In Mexico overall, female labor force participation is below 40 percent. And among the rural communities where most New York's Mexican immigrants originate, the female labor force participation rate is less than 20 percent. In these communities, women historically have higher rates of household work and self-employment, but do not participate as much in the open labor market for hire.

(18) The overall unemployment rate among Mexican workers is about average for New York City. In 2000, the unemployment rate of Mexican New Yorkers was 6.4 percent, compared to 6.0 percent for the overall New York labor force and 9.0 percent among Hispanic/Latino New Yorkers. But there is a wide gulf in unemployment rates by gender. Mexican men have unemployment rates that lie below the average for New York City while Mexican women have above-average unemployment. The unemployment rate for Mexican men in 2000 was just 4.8 percent, but for women it was 10.2 percent. The comparatively low unemployment rate of Mexican men is partly explained by the labor market networking that has led Mexican immigrants to fill highly unskilled job niches in construction and in the food service industry. As the educational attainment of the rest of the population has risen over the last 20 years, these sectors have increasingly offered highly unskilled employment to male immigrants. These niches, however, are not as open to female employment. Immigrant women have had greater access to manufacturing, but this sector has been declining as a source of jobs in the City for many years.

(19) Mexican New Yorkers are employed in a wide array of occupations and industries, but there are sectors where they concentrate. For men, the service sector, manufacturing and construction dominate, with 70 percent of Mexican workers employed in these three industries alone, as compared to 29.7 percent for the overall New York workforce. For women, the service sector and manufacturing are the major sources of employment, with 63.9 percent of all Mexican women employed in these two sectors. Within the service sector, Mexican men have a special niche in the food services and food retail industries, where as much as 42 percent of all Mexican male workers in New York are employed. In some jobs in this sector, the Mexican presence is palpable: 20 percent of all men employed as cooks and food preparation workers in New York are Mexican.

(20) The earnings of Mexican men and women are substantially lower than those of the rest of the New York workforce. The median salary of male Mexican workers in New York City was $15,631 in 1999, about half of what the median worker in the City received, which was $29,155. For Mexican women, the median salary in 1999 was $11,731, compared to $24,469 for the overall female labor force. These earnings figures are among the lowest of all the various racial and ethnic groups in the City. The annual median salary of

Hispanics/Latinos in 1999, for example, was $20,938 for men and $16,300 for women.

(21) One of the reasons behind the low earnings received by Mexican workers is the young age of these laborers. As workers become older and gain experience, their earnings generally rise. In New York City, the average annual salary of workers aged 16 to 19 is about one-third of the earnings of workers aged 35 to 44. But a large portion of the Mexican labor force is precisely in the age range receiving the lowest wages in the City. This causes the earnings of the Mexican labor force to drop relative to those of other, older, racial and ethnic groups.

(22) Mexican youth account for a substantial proportion of the city's youngest workers. Indeed, as much as 23 percent of the New York City labor force in the 16 to 19 age range consists of Mexican workers.

(23) The other side of the coin of the high labor force participation rate of Mexican youth is a low high school retention rate. The school enrollment rates for Mexicans in New York remain high for children up to 14 years of age, but they drop sharply for older teenagers, especially in comparison with the overall New York City student population. For Mexicans aged 14-17 years, the school enrollment rates in 2000 were 62.2 percent for males and 70.7 percent for females. These are sharply lower than those for the overall New York City population aged 14-17, whose enrollment rates were 93.8 percent for males and 95 percent for females. The enrollment gap widens for teenagers aged 18 and 19. For New York City overall, the enrollment rates in this age group are 67.6 percent for males and 71.2 percent for females. But among Mexican teenagers the corresponding figures are only 25 percent and 31.1 percent, respectively.

(24) The educational attainment of Mexican immigrants is substantially lower than that of U.S.-born Mexicans. Only 35.2 percent of foreign-born Mexicans aged 25 years or older had completed high school in the year 2000, as opposed to 68 percent among U.S.-born Mexicans in the same age group.

(25) The combination of low high school retention rates among Mexican teenagers in the U.S. with low levels of schooling among adult Mexican immigrants means that, of all the major racial and ethnic groups in New York City, the Mexican population has by far the lowest educational attainment. Close to 60 percent of Mexican New Yorkers aged 25 years or older had not completed high school in 2000. By comparison, less than 30 percent of the overall New York City population with 25 years of age or older had not completed high school in 2000.

(26) A major reason for the lower earnings –and comparatively low income-per-capita– of Mexican New Yorkers is precisely their lower educational attainment. Greater schooling is amply rewarded in the labor market. In New York City, the average earnings of full-time, year-round workers who had completed up to middle school (8^{th} grade) were $25,306 in 1999. For persons with a high school diploma, the income rises to $36,161. And for those with a college degree, annual earnings were equal to $70,564.

(27) The data presented in this report suggest that to improve the long-term social and economic condition of Mexican New Yorkers, education must be the first priority. For the adult immigrant Mexican population, most of which is still a young adult population, the key policy instruments involve adult literacy, English language proficiency, and programs that combine work with schooling. The role played by hometown community development organizations on this regard may be critical, not only because of their access to the Mexican population but also because of their visibility and influence among Mexican New Yorkers. One of the barriers facing educational programs targeting immigrants is the prevailing perception by many of them that they will return home in the near future. Since they wish to maximize labor market earnings, setting aside time for learning English or acquiring more schooling has a high, perceived opportunity cost. But in many cases, the hope for return migration is delayed for extended periods of time, maybe even permanently. For these workers, not investing in educational skills has a sharply negative impact on their future income in the United States. Reaching such populations and offering educational choices is a task that community organizations can contribute to enormously.

(28) The comparatively low high school retention rate of Mexican teenagers is a second major policy issue of concern. A number of educational reforms have been shown over the years to have some success in dealing with this nationwide problem among Latino youth. These range from systemic changes in school finance, governance and management, to specific, school-based curricular and instructional approaches, including accelerated school programs, early childhood and extended summer school programs, school-to-work initiatives, etc. Strategies targeting the involvement of Latino families and Latino communities in schools have also been shown to be successful.

(29) The young age of the Mexican labor force and its comparatively low level of schooling limit earnings opportunities. But the presence of labor market discrimination and the widespread exploitation and abuse of undocumented workers also affect earnings and working conditions. As a consequence, one of the policy areas with an immediate impact on the standard of living of the Mexican workforce in New York is the increased enforcement of labor laws. Substantial progress has been reached on this account in New York State. But this environment has not been shared at the federal level. These efforts need to be continued and reinforced.

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1. Introduction

Mexicans had the highest rate of population growth of all the major racial and ethnic groups in New York City in the 1990s. According to the U.S. Census of Population, between 1990 and 2000, the number of Mexicans residing in New York tripled, from 61,722 to 186,872. By comparison, the overall population of New York City rose by 9.4 percent during this same time period. Mexicans now compose the third largest Hispanic group in the City (only Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have a greater presence

Despite the spiraling visibility of Mexicans in New York, relatively little systematic information is available about their current social and economic situation. There is an extensive literature on the socioeconomic and labor market status of the overall Mexican population in the country, mostly focusing on the Southwestern U.S. [see, for example, de la Garza et.al. (1985), Bean and Tienda (1987), DeFreitas (1991), Rivera-Batiz (1994a, 1999), Ortiz (1996), Reimers (1997), Trejo (1997), Suarez-Orozco (1998), and Gonzalez (2002)]. There is also some research available on the budding Mexican population of New York in the early 1990s and studies of specific issues, such as the migration process, education, identity, and gender [see Smith (1996, 2003), Cortina and Gendreau (2001), Martinez-Leon and Smith (2001), Rivera-Sanchez (2002), and Ricourt and Danta (2003)]. And research on other Latino groups in New York City has proliferated in recent years [see, Haslip-Viera and Baver (1996), Hernandez and Rivera-Batiz

(1997), and Rivera-Batiz (1994, 2002b, 2003a)]. But there is no overall profile of the Mexican population of New York that includes the latest data on its amazing growth in the last decade

Who are Mexican New Yorkers? What are their characteristics? This research report presents a comprehensive analysis of the Mexican population in New York City. The study utilizes the 2000 U.S. Census of Population and other data sources in providing a current picture of the demographics, labor market outcomes, and economic status of the Mexican New Yorkers.

2. Growth of the Mexican Population Residing in New York City

The U.S. Census of Population found that there were 186,872 Mexicans residing in New York City on April 2000. This constitutes a substantial increase over the 61,722 Mexican New Yorkers counted by the Census in 1990. In fact, as Table 1 shows, Mexicans had the highest rate of population growth in New York in the 1990s, rising by 202.8 percent compared to the 9.4 percent growth of the City population overall. Mexicans have now become the third largest

Table 1
The Mexican Population Residing in New York City, 2000

Racial and Ethnic Group	1990 Pop.	2000 Pop.	Increase (% Change)
Mexican	**61,722**	**186,872**	**202.8%**
New York City Total	7,322,564	8,008,278	9.4%
Non-Hispanic White	3,163,125	2,801,267	-11.4%
Non-Hispanic Black/African American	1,847,049	1,962,154	6.2%
Asian and Pacific	489,851	783,058	59.9%
Hispanic/Latino	1,783,511	2,160,554	21.2%
Puerto Rican	896,763	789,172	-12.0%
Dominican	332,713	554,087	66.5%
Other	39,028	301,245	__

Source: New York City Department of City Planning (2002), based on 2000 U.S. Census.

Hispanic/Latino group, behind Puerto Ricans (789,172 in 2000) and Dominicans (estimated to be 554,087 in 2000). And if the current rates of population growth continue, the Mexican population of New York City may rise to over 350,000 by the end of the current decade.

The remarkable growth of Mexican New Yorkers is reflected in the fact that New York is now one of the top 15 cities in the concentration of Mexicans in the U.S. Table 2 displays these cities, ranked by their Mexican population. New York is ranked No. 11, following cities with a long-standing Mexican community like San Diego, Santa Ana and San Jose. But in contrast to those cities, New York City accounts for most of the Mexican population in the state. In 2000, three-quarters of Mexicans residing in the state of New York were located in the City.

Table 2

Largest Mexican Populations in U.S. Cities, 2000

	Mexican Population in 2000	Rank
Los Angeles, CA	1,091,686	1
Chicago, ILL	530,462	2
Houston, TX	527,442	3
San Antonio, TX	473,420	4
Phoenix, AZ	375,096	5
El Paso, TX	359,695	6
Dallas, TX	350,495	7
San Diego, CA	259,219	8
Santa Ana, CA	222,719	9
San Jose, CA	221,148	10
New York City, NY	**186,872**	**11**
Tucson, AZ	145,234	12
Austin, TX	153,868	13
Fresno City, CA	144,772	14
Laredo, TX	133,185	15

Data are for central cities.
Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4

The growth of the Mexican population residing in New York has gradually accelerated over the last three decades, rising from 7,893 in 1970 to 25,577 in 1980, to 61,722 in 1990 and, finally, to186,872 in the year 2000. No place shows more vividly this remarkable expansion than the borough of Queens. In 1980, there were 4,463 Mexicans residing in Queens. By 2000, this number had risen to 55,481.

Table 3 decomposes the Mexican population of New York by borough of residence. Most Mexicans are located in Brooklyn and Queens, where, together, 61.2 percent of Mexican New Yorkers live. Within Brooklyn, the neighborhoods of Sunset Park and Bushwick have major Mexican populations. In Queens, it is Elmhurst, North Corona, and Jackson Heights where Mexicans are concentrated. And in Manhattan, East Harlem has a visible Mexican presence. Figure 1 displays these and other areas of New York where the Mexican populations of New York reside in greatest concentrations.

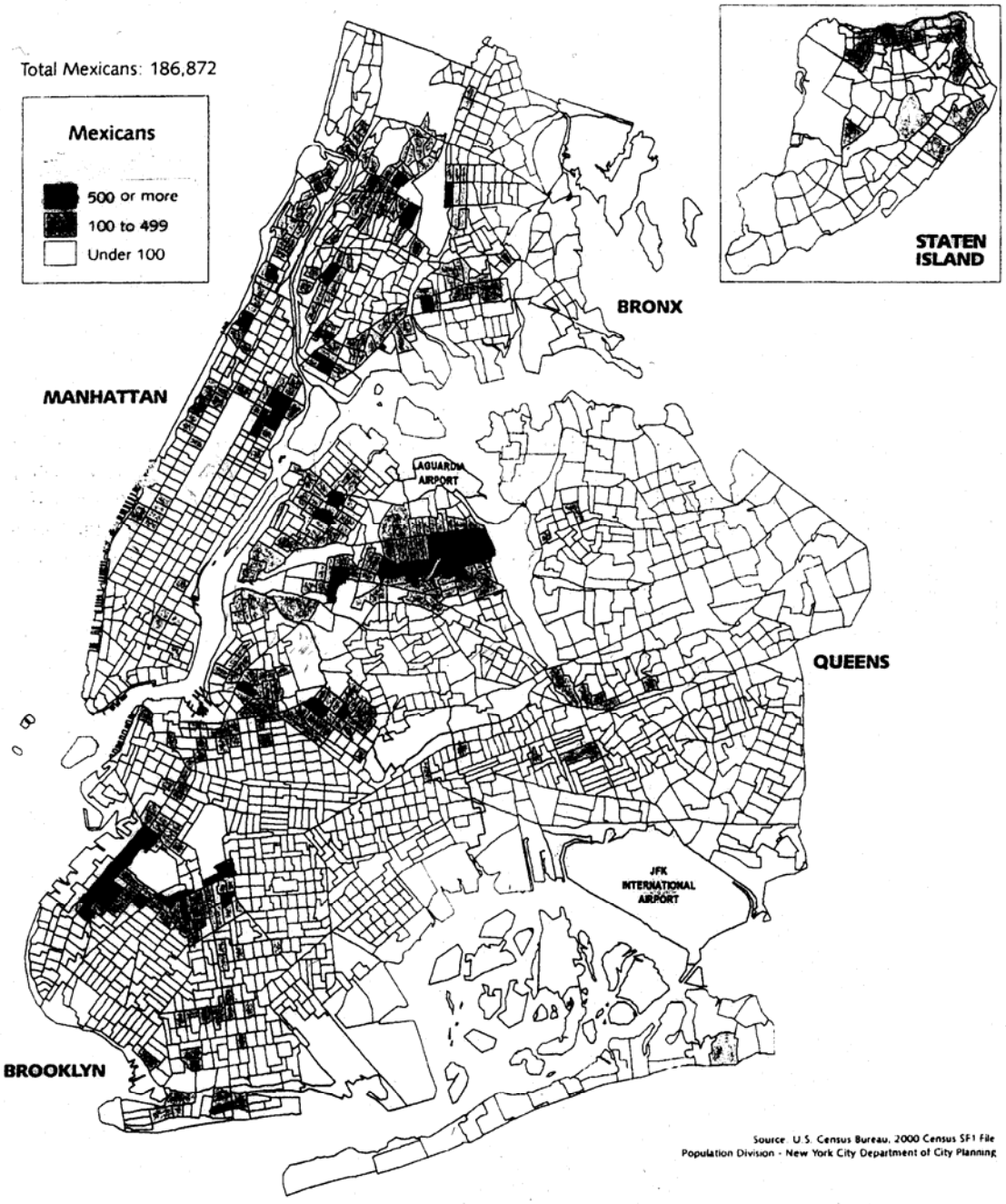
Table 3

The Mexican Population of New York City, By Borough

New York City Borough	Population in 2000	Percentage of total Mexican population in 2000
Brooklyn	58,825	31.5%
Queens	55,481	29.7
The Bronx	34,377	18.4
Manhattan	30,391	16.2
Staten Island	7,798	4.2
Total	186,872	100.0%

Source: New York City Department of City Planning (2002) and 2000 Census.

Figure 1. The Distribution of The Mexican Population in New York City



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What explains the rapid increase of the Mexican population residing in New York? Partly, the growth in New York reflects the general expansion of the Mexican population in the United States in the decade of the 1990s. As Table 4 displays, the Mexican population in the U.S. grew by 52.9 percent between 1990 and 2000, substantially above the overall growth rate of the population in the country, which was 13.2 percent for this time period.

Yet, the substantial growth of the overall Mexican population in the United States falls far short of its explosive rise in New York City. There is an explanation for this. The expansion in New York reflects a new pattern of Mexican location in the U.S., a pattern that is more geographically diversified than in the past. There are three major reasons for this new trend.

Firstly, the migration responds to a search for new sources of employment. The great majority of Mexican immigrants moving to the United States over the last thirty years flowed into a few states mostly in the Western or Southwestern United States: California, Texas, Illinois,

Table 4

Growth of the Mexican Population of the United States, 1990-2000

	1990 Population	2000 Population	Change in Population, 1990-2000 (%)
Population of the U.S., Overall	248,710,000	281,421,906	13.2%
Mexican Population in the U.S.	13,496,000	20,640,711	52.9%
Mexican Population in New York	61,722	186,872	202.8%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census of Population, 1990 and 2000.

Nevada, Arizona, etc. As labor markets in these states flooded with immigrants in the late 1980s and 1990s, many Mexicans started to search for alternative job locations, from poultry processing and meatpacking in the Midwest to service sector jobs and construction in New York City.

Secondly, the threat of anti-immigrant legislation (as embodied in, for example, the passage of Proposition 187 in California in 1994), and the more stringent actions of the U.S. border enforcement efforts in the 1990s and 2000s led many illegal –and legal– immigrants to move out of California into other parts of the country [see Massey, Durand and Malone (2002), pp. 126-128]. New York City, in particular, because of its history, has enjoyed a pro-immigration environment that stands in sharp contrast to that displayed in California during the 1990s. This stimulated Mexican immigrants to move to New York.

Thirdly, the legalization of undocumented immigrants under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) allowed many Mexican immigrants to have greater mobility within the United States. IRCA allowed undocumented workers who had continuously resided in the United States since January 1, 1982, to apply for temporary resident status before the deadline of May 4, 1988. Once a person applied for temporary resident status, he or she could also apply for permanent resident status by the deadline of November 6, 1990. In addition, there were special amnesty provisions allowing some types of temporary agricultural workers to apply for legalization [Rivera-Batiz (1991)]. Over three million legalizations applications were processed through the Immigration and Naturalization Service (now the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services), with one million and a quarter filed by Mexican undocumented workers [see Hoefer (1991)]. Some of these migrants ended up in New York City.

Immigration is indeed the major source of the rapid Mexican population growth in New York. As Table 5 shows, there were 145,012 Mexican immigrants residing in New York City in 2000. This accounts for close to 80 percent of the resident Mexican population in the City. Most of these immigrants moved to the country in the nineties: 97,023 (or about half) of all Mexicans residing in New York in 2000 moved to the U.S. between 1990 and 2000.

Table 5

Immigration and the Mexican Population of New York, 2000

	Population in 2000	Percentage of Total Mexican Population in New York City
Mexican New Yorkers, Total	186,872	100.0%
Born in the U.S.	41,860	22.4%
Born Outside the U.S.	145,012	77.6%
Arrived 1990 to 2000	97,023	51.9%
Arrived 1980 to 1989	38,626	20.7%
Arrived Before 1980	9,363	5.0%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

The high proportion of recent immigrants among Mexicans in New York makes it different from other cities with large Mexican concentrations. New York has by far the highest proportion of recent immigrants. Table 6 shows that in Los Angeles, 52.5% of the Mexican population was born outside the United States, compared to 77.6% among Mexican New Yorkers. Furthermore, only 21.3% of the Mexican population of Los Angeles entered the United States as immigrants during the 1990s, compared to 51.9% among Mexican New Yorkers. In other cities, the immigrant population constitutes an even smaller percentage of the Mexican population. In San Antonio, for example, only 18.2 percent of the Mexican population was born outside the U.S., and 6.5% moved to the U.S. in the 1990s.

Table 6

Mexican Immigrants in Selected Cities of the U.S., 2000

City	Proportion of Population Born in U.S.	Proportion of Population Born Outside The U.S.	Proportion of Mexican Population Who are Immigrants Arriving in U.S. Between 1990 and 2000
New York City	22.4%	77.6%	51.9%
Los Angeles	47.5%	52.5%	21.3%
Chicago	46.9%	53.1%	24.1%
Houston	51.5%	48.5%	25.6%
San Antonio	81.8%	18.2%	6.5%
San Diego	55.2%	44.8%	16.1%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

The data presented in Tables 5 and 6 are obtained from the population counts of the decennial U.S. Census of population. The Census seeks to include all Mexican immigrants residing in New York, including both documented and undocumented immigrants. But there are no means of identifying the relative composition of documented and undocumented migrants: the Census does not ask questions regarding visa status or immigration documents. There are, however, alternative sources of information.

Estimates of the undocumented Mexican population residing in New York in the late 1980s can be obtained from the results of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). As noted earlier, IRCA included provisions for the amnesty of a large fraction of

undocumented workers residing in the U.S. at the time. The number of illegal immigrants residing in New York City who applied for legalization under the amnesty provisions of IRCA in the late 1980s was 125,700 [Hoefer (1991), Rytina (2002)]. But out of this group, only 9,300 were Mexican. Although not all undocumented workers were eligible for legalization, this number suggests that the undocumented Mexican population residing in New York City in the late 1980s was not a substantial one.

Alternative estimates of the undocumented population also fail to provide comparatively large estimates of the undocumented Mexican population residing in New York in the early 1990s. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) as well as independent academic researchers have supplied estimates of the number of illegal immigrants residing in the U.S. for many years. These studies use, in some way or another, the so-called residual methodology to measure-up the illegal immigrant population. This methodology visualizes illegal immigrants as the difference between the total number of immigrants who are counted as residing in the U.S. at any given moment in time and the number of legal immigrants residing here [Rivera-Batiz (2000)]. The overall number of immigrants in the U.S. is usually obtained by means of national surveys of the population, such as the decennial Census or the annual Current Population Survey. The number of legal immigrants is computed from INS and Office of Refugee Settlements data, which include the number of naturalized residents, permanent residents, refugees and other legal immigrants in the country. An estimate of the number of illegal immigrants is then provided by the difference, or residual, between the total immigrants counted or estimated by using Census-type data and the number of legal immigrants counted through the use of INS and other data.

Using this methodology, in 1993, the INS provided detailed estimates of the undocumented population residing in New York State in 1992. Their estimate was that there

were a total of 490,000 illegal migrants residing in the state. Among these, less than 10,000 were estimated to have been Mexican (out of which 70 to 80 percent would have resided in New York City). More recently, Passel and Clark (1998) provided estimates of the undocumented population in New York State for 1995 that equaled 464,000, with 17,000 born in Mexico. They also calculated that the number of Mexican undocumented workers in New York State rose by 5,000 between 1995 and 1996.

The latest estimates provided by the INS of the overall illegal alien population residing in New York State for the year 2000 show that population to be at 489,000 [U.S. INS (2003)]. This is lower than the INS estimate for 1992 and only slightly higher than the one obtained by Passel and Clark for 1995. These numbers would therefore suggest that the overall illegal immigrant population of New York did not rise at a fast pace in the 1990s. But there are a number of indications that undocumented Mexicans are becoming a larger force within the illegal migrant flow to New York. First of all, undocumented Mexican migration to the U.S. clearly accelerated after the 1994-1995 economic crisis in Mexico. In addition, a growing fraction of Mexican immigrants began to move to non-traditional destinations in the 1990s, including New York. And more undocumented workers are staying in the U.S., as medium-term or long-term residents.

If one considers the earlier-stated Passel-Clark estimate of 12,000 Mexican illegal migrants residing in New York State in 1995 and combine it with their estimate of an annual increase of 5,000 Mexican illegal immigrants in New York State, assuming that this increase held as well for the period of 1996-2000, then the population of undocumented workers in New York State would be estimated to equal 42,000 in the year 2000.With 80 percent of that flow settling in New York City, the City's resident Mexican undocumented population would have

been about 33,600 in the year 2000. But since all indications are that the flow of Mexican undocumented workers to New York rose in the second half of the nineties, the numbers are likely to be higher. For instance, if instead of assuming that 5,000 Mexican undocumented migrants moved annually to New York State in the second half of the nineties, one assumes that 10,000 did, their population would have climbed to 62,000 in the state and close to 50,000 in New York City by the year 2000.

Summarizing: estimates of New York City's resident Mexican undocumented population would place that population in the year 2000 at a range of 30,000 to 60,000. This represents between 20 and 40 percent of the total Mexican-born population residing in the City. These numbers are, of course, rough estimates since there are no official counts of undocumented migrants. In addition, they do not include the tens of thousands of Mexican temporary workers who live in the City but are not included as part of its resident population, as the next section examines.

3. The Census Undercount of Mexicans in New York

The population numbers stated in the last section differ markedly from the conventional wisdom, which places the Mexican population of New York City at a substantially higher level. Indeed, many experts and observers placed the number of Mexican New Yorkers in 1990 to be already at or above 100,000. For instance, Valdes de Montano and Smith (1994) estimated the Mexican population in 1990 to be about 100,000. With the acceleration of migration to New York in the last decade, the common belief among experts is that the Mexican population in New York City has grown to be substantially above the Census count, as high as 275,000-300,0000 in the year 2000 [Kamber (2001), Smith (2002)] or maybe even higher [Rosenbaum (2001), Jacoby (2002)].

There are two reasons why both the Census data as well as the undocumented population estimates supplied above (which are partly based on Census data) may suffer from a serious undercount of the Mexican population located in New York City in 2000.

First of all, past U.S. Censuses have been known to miss significant portions of the minority populations residing in large metropolitan areas. It is estimated that the 1990 Census failed to count 4 percent of the non-Hispanic Black population as well as 5 percent of the Hispanic population in the country [U.S. Department of Commerce (1996)]. A variety of efforts were undertaken by the 2000 Census takers to reduce this undercount. Some of these efforts did pay-off. The estimate is that 1.8 percent of the non-Hispanic Black population and 0.7 percent of the Hispanic population was undercounted in 2000. Still, the poor urban neighborhoods where recent immigrant groups, including many New York Mexican migrants, reside continue to have substantially higher undercount rates.

A second explanation for a Census undercount of the Mexican population is the fact that the Census enumerates only persons whose usual residence is the United States. This specifically excludes citizens of foreign countries temporarily visiting the U.S., who are considered to have residence in their home country. But a large number of Mexicans in the U.S. are indeed in the country temporarily, or otherwise plan to be in the U.S. only temporarily. Most undocumented workers, for example, plan to –-and many do-- return back home. Some move back and forth between the two nations. They do not consider their "usual residence" to be north of the border. As a result, they are automatically exempted from filling out census forms and do not form part of the census count. They are also excluded from the estimates of the undocumented resident population in the country discussed earlier.

This non-resident, undocumented worker population can be substantial. The consensus among many experts is that over the last twenty years, only between 30 and 40 percent of all undocumented migrants who seek to cross the border is detected [see Espenshade and Acevedo (1995), Massey and Singer (1998) and Massey, Durand and Malone (2002)]. With over 1 million Mexican undocumented immigrants being apprehended each year, this implies that between 2.5

and 3.3 million illegal immigrants are able to penetrate the border successfully annually. Even if a small fraction of these migrants makes its way to New York, it would still constitute tens of thousands of workers flowing into the city each year.

Of course, this massive influx of migrants is accompanied by a substantial outflow of workers. Estimates of the return migration of undocumented migrants indicate that, at the beginning of the 1990s, as many as 86 percent of all undocumented immigrants would return to Mexico within five years of their entry into the U.S. However, these return probabilities have declined in recent years, a paradoxical side effect of the buildup of border interdiction resources and the concomitant rise in the dangers involved in crossing the border illegally [Massey, Durand and Malone (2002)]. This is particularly the case for undocumented migrants moving to New York City, where the costs of moving from Mexico are substantially higher. These migrants have to pay first the costs of moving from Puebla and other areas of Southwestern Mexico to the border region. Then they have to endure the risks of drowning, heat exposure, robbery or extortion, assault, etc. that are involved in the physical act of crossing the border. And they must pay the comparatively higher cost of being transported by coyotes (smugglers) to New York City, a process that involves an airplane trip to a New York City airport and may run into thousands of dollars, instead of the hundreds that may take to be transported to U.S. territory along the Southwestern border [see the descriptions of this migratory process by Kamber (2001) and Breslin (2002)]. As a result, undocumented workers remain in the City for longer periods of time, although still expecting to return back to Mexico sometime in the future.

These undocumented Mexican migrant workers are likely to constitute a rising number of people who, despite their own expectations, will probably stay in New York for long periods of time, perhaps permanently. Yet, they are usually not counted by the Census or included in estimates of the undocumented migrant population.

Given the Census undercount, what would be the total Mexican population of New York? As noted earlier, the perceptions among experts is that, if one counts all Mexicans living in New York City, the total population may have grown to be as high as 275,000 to 300,0000 in the year

2000. This is sharply higher than the Census count of 186,182. But there is no formal study that can confirm these numbers. It should be a matter of future research to provide a reliable estimate of the Census undercount and calculate the number of –and study the characteristics of— the population of temporary undocumented Mexican workers in the U.S. and in New York City.

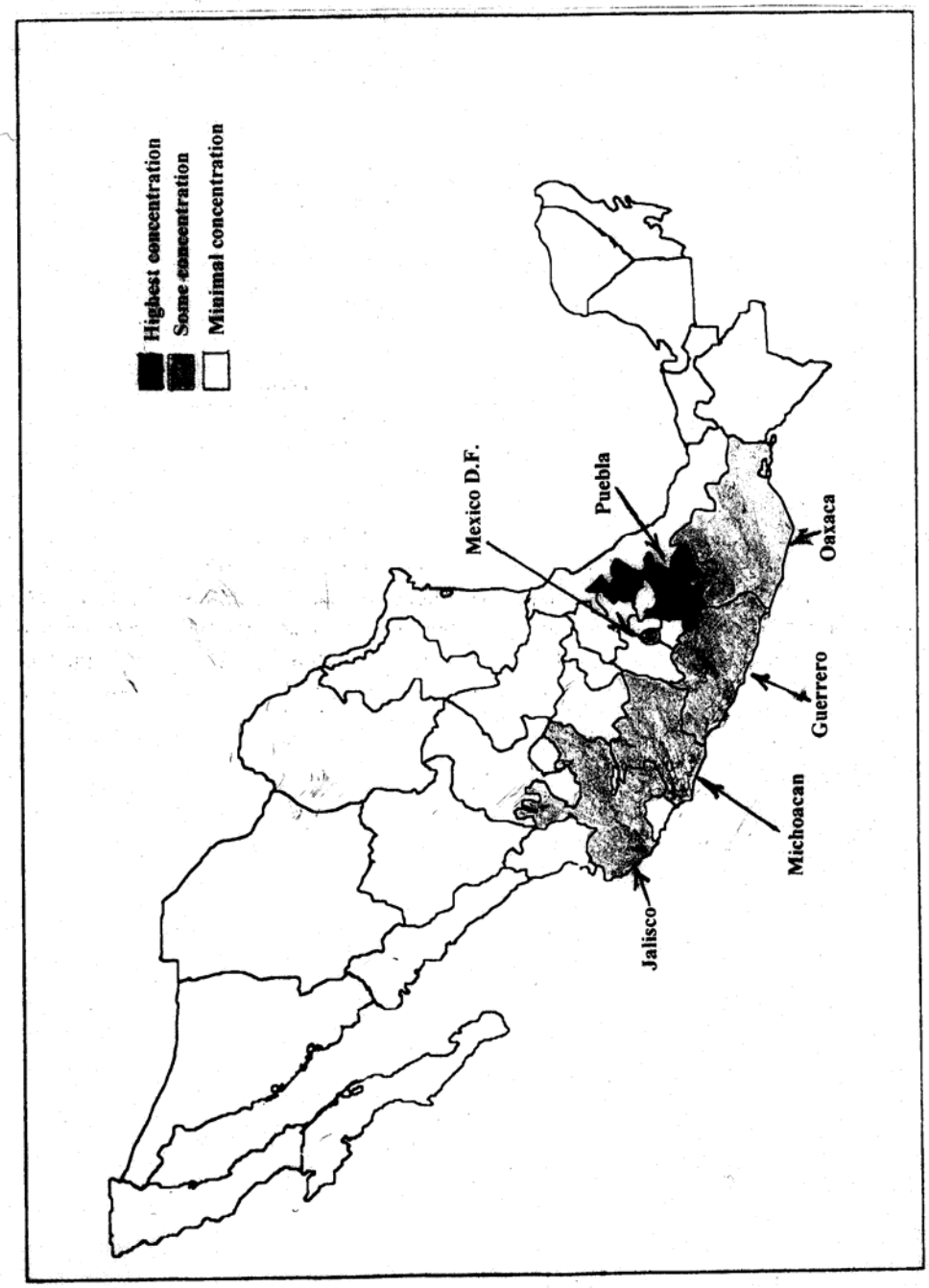
4. Pueblanos in New York City: The Origin of the Mexican Population of New York

The place of origin of Mexican New Yorkers differs sharply from that of the overall Mexican migrant population in the U.S. Most Mexican migrants were born in the states of Jalisco, Michoacan, Guanajuato, Mexico D.F., San Luis Potosi, Chihuahua, Zacatecas and Baja California. But the great majority of Mexican immigrants in New York were born in the state of Puebla (see Figure 2).

The exact proportion of Mexican New Yorkers originating in Puebla is not known. Estimates in the late 1980s and early 1990s indicated that about half of the population was from Puebla. For instance, the 1989/1992 Legalized Population Survey collected data on undocumented immigrants who applied for legalization under IRCA. In this survey, approximately 53 percent of the Mexican undocumented immigrants residing in New York at the time they applied for legalization were born in Puebla (an additional 16 percent were from Guerrero). In 1994, Valdes and Smith (1994) concluded that, at the time, 47 percent of Mexican immigrants came from Puebla and 64 percent from the Mixteca Baja region of Mexico, which includes parts of Puebla, Guerrero and Oaxaca.

But the population coming from Puebla may have risen in the last ten years. Table 7 presents the distribution of Mexican migrants to the U.S. by state of origin, as determined by the Mexican Migration Project (MMP). The Mexican Migration Project has sampled Mexican migrants to the U.S. for over a decade. The migrants are interviewed mostly when they return back to Mexico, as part of a more general survey of the population in that country. Over 17,000 migrants who have resided in the U.S. at some point in their lives have been interviewed.

Figure 2. Place of Birth of Mexican Migrants in New York City



Source: Author's calculations, based on data from Mexican Migration Project Database (2002).

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Table 7 shows the states where most Mexican migrants in the MMP sample originated, both for all migrants who worked in the United States and for those who worked in New York City. Note that, for the U.S. overall, the greatest portion of Mexican migrants originated in Jalisco, Michoacan, Zacatecas and Guanajuato. Puebla is not on the list of major source areas for the overall Mexican migrant population. On the other hand, Puebla was the place of birth of 73 percent of those migrants who worked in New York City while they were north of the border. Other Mexican states that sent migrants to New York, as sampled by the MMP Project, include Guerrero, Jalisco, Mexico City and Michoacan, but the proportions are much smaller compared to the Pueblanos.

Table 7

Top Places of Birth of Mexican Migrants Who Resided in New York while in the U.S.

United States	New York City
Jalisco (16%) Michoacan (15%) Zacatecas (15%) Guanajuato (11%)	Puebla (73%)

Source: Author's Tabulations, Mexican Migration Project Database, University of Guadalajara and University of Pennsylvania, 2002.

The reason for the concentration of Pueblanos in New York City is the same that links so many other specific towns and cities in the U.S. and Mexico: network migration. Most Mexican migration to the U.S. is the result of a process that has developed over long periods of time, involving migrant networks connecting the migrants and non-migrants at home and abroad in an

integral way [see Piore (1979), Massey, Alarcon, Durand and Gonzalez (1987) and Bauer, Gang and Epstein (2000) for analyses of this process].

The underlying motivation of the migrants is economic, based on their desire to supplement the income or wealth of their families at home, given the lack of economic opportunities in Mexico and the availability of such opportunities in the United States [see Rivera-Batiz (2002a)]. Even today, the gap in income per-capita between Mexico and the U.S. is huge. The per-capita income of Mexico in 2001 was $8,240 while in the U.S. it was over four times greater, $34,280, adjusted for differences in the cost of living between the two countries [World Bank (2002)]. The returns to being employed in any given occupation in the U.S. are many times higher than those from a comparable job in Mexico.

Historically, most Mexican immigrants have seen their migration to the U.S. as a measure that allows them and their families to finance desired consumption or investment items back home. For some, the process is associated with raising funds for investment in employment-related activities, whether it involves purchasing land or equipment. For others, remittances are used to supplement basic needs, in food, clothing, medicine, etc. As some of the migrants and their families accumulate wealth, this provides visible incentives for other residents of their communities to migrate to the same source of jobs in the U.S. An intricate network thus develops between the sending and recipient communities, effectively reducing the costs of moving across the border, leading to an acceleration of the migration process. Over time, as the links between the communities develop, a significant population decides to stay for longer periods of time in the United States. Often, they will have children enrolled in American schools. Sometimes, the improvement in standards of living leads to a change of mind about permanent settlement. In other cases, economic progress is not achieved as quickly as it was expected, delaying the return home. If the workers are undocumented, some of them eventually achieve legal status and remain in the U.S. Whatever is the case, the presence of a more or less permanent population of migrants on the northern side of the border further solidifies the flows of immigrants from the south, providing a source of information about employment opportunities and assistance to

newcomers.

This is precisely the process that led to the linkage of specific communities in Puebla to New York City. Migrants from Puebla and the Mixteca region first began to locate in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s. Barnard College sociologist Robert C. Smith has documented one of the historical origins of the Puebla-New York connection, as embodied by two men, Pedro and his brother Fermin. Don Pedro migrated to New York from a farm in a Mexican community that Smith refers to as Ticuani, in Puebla, back in the summer of 1942. As Smith (1996, pp. 60-61) describes it: "According to Don Pedro, this Mexican migration to New York City began almost by accident. Don Pedro and his brother were working in Mexico City, attempting to get contracts for the Bracero Program, through which the U.S. government brought Mexicans to the United States to work in agriculture on contracts of several weeks' or several months' duration. Then, a friend of Don Pedro's put him in touch with Alberto Montesinos, an Italian American from New York who vacationed in Mexico City every summer. Montesinos gave the two Ticuanenses (people from Ticuani) a ride to New York, put them up in a hotel, and found them jobs within two days. "There was a war on, so they were happy to have us working," Don Pedro told me in 1993. "We opened the road," he said, looking back on the fifty years of migration to New York from Puebla that began with his own trip."

How the process of network or chain migration unfolds is well-illustrated by another case described this time by the journalist Michael Kamber (2001), in an award-winning *Village Voice* piece on Mexican migration to New York from Zapotitlan de Salinas, a village in the state of Puebla: "Luis Garcia, the first resident of Zapotitlán to arrive in New York, in 1983, settled near Willis Avenue, in the Bronx, down the block from where the 6 train stops under the 40th Precinct. Within a few years, dozens of friends and relatives were arriving with little more than his phone number, and they slept on his couch or on mattresses lined up on the floor. Gradually the community grew and relocated; some went out to Queens, a few moved south to the burgeoning Mexican community in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Most, however, stayed near the 6 train, following the el north along Westchester Avenue to Soundview and Castle Hill in the

Bronx. They are there today, perhaps a thousand strong; at just one building, 690 Allerton Avenue, at the corner of White Plains Road, there are an estimated 50 families from Zapotitlán…They find each other work, baby-sit one another's children. In a strange land, they take comfort in neighbors they have known since childhood."

Located on the East Central part of Mexico (see Figure 2), Puebla is a state of approximately 5 million people. Although not amongst the poorest states in that country (those would include Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero), Puebla has a per-capita income which is less than one-third that of the Mexican Capital District (Mexico D.F.) and substantially lower than the overall average for the country [INEGI(2003a)]. In fact, on the basis of the Mexican government's index of socioeconomic well-being (computed on the basis of state indicators of schooling, housing, employment, child mortality, etc.), Puebla is ranked as being in category 2, which is the next-to-lowest category, much lower than the maximum of 7, which is held by Mexico's Capital District [INEGI (2003b)].

Within the state of Puebla, the great majority of the New York City migrants originate in rural communities. Agricultural production is the basis for the economy of these communities (Puebla is a major producer of corn, beans, sugar, and coffee). But this sector –-as the rest of the rural economy of Puebla-- has not fared well over the last thirty years. The share of agriculture in the Gross Domestic Product of the state of Puebla declined from 15 percent in 1970 to 3 percent in 2000. This slump is partly associated with a long-term economic restructuring away from agriculture and towards manufacturing and services. But it was aggravated by the economic deterioration in Mexico since the early 1980s. The stagnation began with the 1982 debt crisis and was aggravated by the 1994-1995 financial crisis, both of which had serious repercussions for many years. As a result, the income per-capita of Mexico in 1999 was virtually the same as that prevailing in 1981. No growth in almost twenty years had a devastating effect on Puebla, as reflected in long-term stagnation and, in many rural areas, declining standards of living. Substantial numbers of Pueblanos remain illiterate or with very low levels of schooling. Housing conditions are at basic levels for large portions of the population: According to the data from the

Mexican Migration Project, as much as 41 percent of the dwellings in those rural communities of Puebla where the great majority of migrants to New York come from have only dirt floors and a large fraction of them do not have indoor plumbing. Most importantly, stable employment opportunities and income levels have remained scarce. According to the data from the Mexican Migration Project, as much as 37 percent of the economically active population in the communities from Puebla sending large fractions of migrants to New York receive wages below the Mexican minimum wage.

It can be concluded that the intricate migration networks established by specific communities in Puebla (and other parts of Mexico) with New York through a period of over fifty years established the foundations for Mexican migration to the city. But the raw materials for the great Mexican migration to New York in the 1990s were the economic crises in Mexico since the early 1980s, as reflected in a magnified way in the rural areas of Puebla.

5. Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of a population can deeply influence the group's social and economic status. For instance, age is a major factor influencing employment and earnings. Similarly, marital status and family structure can be intricately connected to family poverty. This section presents data on the major demographic characteristics of Mexican New Yorkers, comparing them with the rest of New York City. We focus first on gender, turning then to examine age distribution and family composition.

The Mexican population of New York has the lowest proportion of women of any major racial and ethnic group in the city. As Table 8 displays, the proportion of women among Mexican New Yorkers is 42.3 %, compared to 52.7% among the overall New York City population. The comparatively low proportion of women among Mexicans in New York is

related to the large immigrant component in that population and the fact that the composition of Mexican immigrants in general is tilted towards men. Among Mexican New Yorkers born outside the United States, only 39.1% are female. By contrast, almost half (49.8%) of all Mexican New Yorkers born in the U.S. are female. A similar pattern is found among Mexican immigrants in a number of other major cities, such as Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston.

Table 8

The Gender Distribution of Mexican New Yorkers, 2000

Population Group	Proportion of Women as a Percentage of the Group's Population
Mexican Population in New York	42.3%
Mexicans Born in the U.S.	49.8%
Mexicans Born Outside the U.S.	39.1%
New York City Average	52.7%
Non-Hispanic White Population	52.1%
Non-Hispanic Black/African American Population	55.7%
Non-Hispanic Asian Population	50.5%
Hispanic/Latino Population, Overall	52.1%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

The Mexican population in New York City is very young. As Table 9 shows, its median age in the year 2000 was 24.3 years, drastically lower than that of the overall New York City population, which was 34.4 years. This makes Mexican New Yorkers the youngest population of all the major racial and ethnic groups in New York. By comparison, the non-Hispanic White population had a median age of 40.6 years in 2000, the Black/African American population's median age was 32.6 years, the Asian's was 34, and that of the overall Hispanic/Latino population was 29.4 years.

Marital status and family structure are key demographic variables that have been linked to socioeconomic status. Single-headed households with children tend to have lower income per capita than married-couple families. This is particularly so for female-headed households, who on average have much lower income and higher poverty rates. In New York City, for example, the annual median family income of married-couple families with own children under 18 in the year 2000 was $52,035, compared to $16,760 for female-headed households with children.

Table 9

The Median Age of Mexican New Yorkers, 2000

	Median Age
Mexican Population	24.3
New York City Average	34.4
Non-Hispanic White Population	40.6
Non-Hispanic Black/African American Population	32.6
Non-Hispanic Asian Population	34.0
Hispanic/Latino Population, Overall	29.4

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

Although family structure figures prominently in the study of a number of racial and ethnic minorities in urban areas [see Rivera-Batiz and Santiago (1994), Hernandez, Rivera-Batiz and Agodini (1995), Hernandez and Rivera-Batiz (1997), Wilson (1997, chapter 4), Cancian and Reed (2001), and Mangum, Mangum and Sum (2003)], in the case of the Mexican population, it does not appear to be a significant factor. Table 10 shows that married couple families constitute the great majority of families among Mexican New Yorkers. The percentage of Mexicans living as part of married-couple families in the year 2000 was 62.3%, which is slightly higher than the average for New York City (61.8%) and substantially greater than the equivalent for the overall Hispanic/Latino population (49.7%). Only a very small fraction of Mexican New Yorkers were living in female-headed households with own children less than 18 years of age. A total of 12.4 percent of Mexican New Yorkers lived in these households in 2000, which was below the average for New York City. By comparison, the prevalence of female-headed households with children was more than twice as much among the overall Hispanic/Latino population.

Table 10

The Family Structure of Mexicans in New York, 2000

	Population Living in Married Couple Families (As % of Total Population in the Group)	Population Living in Female-Headed Families with no Spouse Present and with Own Children Under 18 years of Age (As % of Total Pop. in the Group)
Mexican Population	62.3%	12.4%
New York City Average	61.8%	16.6%
Hispanic/Latino, Overall	49.7%	25.4%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

5. The Socioeconomic Status of the Mexican Population of New York City

What is the current socioeconomic status of the Mexican population in New York City? How does it compare with that of other racial and ethnic groups? To measure the average standard of living of a population, economists usually adopt the concept of household income. However, in comparing the household income of various groups in the population, the number of persons residing in a household must be adjusted for, as this may vary across the groups examined. Two households may have identical income but widely different standards of living if one household has ten persons living in it while the other has only three. To adjust for differences in household size, one must compute household income per-capita, which is equal to household income divided by the number of persons in the household.

This adjustment is essential in examining the standard of living of Mexican New Yorkers because average household size is substantially higher among Mexican households. In 2000, the average number of persons in a Mexican household was 4.6 persons, compared to 2.6 among the overall New York City population and 3.2 for the overall Hispanic/Latino population of the City. Given these differences, using household income may provide a misleading measure of the average standard of living of the Mexican population compared to other groups. The more appropriate indicator is per-capita household income.

Column 1 of Table 11 displays the average annual household income per-capita of various groups of New Yorkers in 1999. As can be seen, the per-capita income of the average Mexican household was less than half that of the overall New York City population. Mexicans had an average per-capita income of $10,231 compared to an average of $22,402 among New York households in general. The income of Mexican households was below that of all the other major groups listed in Table 11. For instance, the income per-capita among non-Hispanic White households in 1999 was $36,800, which is over three times the income per-capita of the average Mexican household. Even among the Hispanic/Latino population, the mean

Table 11

The Income Per-Capita of Mexican Households in New York City

	Mean Annual Household Income Per-Capita, 1999
Mexican Population	$10,231
New York City Average	22,402
Non-Hispanic White	36,800
Non-Hispanic Black or African American	15,568
Non-Hispanic Asian	18,787
Hispanic/Latino Population, Overall	12,206

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

per-capita income was $12,206, about 20 percent higher than that of the Mexican population.

Associated with the comparatively low income-per-person received by Mexican New Yorkers is a high percentage of the population living under the poverty line. Poverty status is determined by comparing the income of the family where the person lives with an income threshold measuring the amount of resources that a family needs in order to purchase a basic, minimum food budget. This threshold varies with the number of persons in the family, number of children, and age of family members. For example, the average income threshold for a family consisting of two adults with one child is $13,410 for 1999, but for a family of two adults and three children, the threshold rises to $19,882. The poverty rate is the percentage of persons living in families with income below the poverty income threshold.

Table 12

Poverty Among Mexicans in New York City, 1999

	Poverty Rate (% of the Group's Population)
Mexican Population	33.0%
New York City Average	21.2
Non-Hispanic White Population	11.5
Non-Hispanic Black/African American Population	25.0
Non-Hispanic Asian Population	19.6
Hispanic/Latino Population, Overall	30.8

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

Table 12 displays the percentage of the population of the major racial and ethnic groups in New York living in households with income below the poverty line. One out of every three Mexicans in New York had income below the poverty level. This compares with a 21.2 percent poverty rate among New Yorkers in general in 1999, and a 30.2 percent among the overall Hispanic/Latino population of New York.

The figures presented in this Section have provided a profile of the income and poverty encountered by the Mexican population in New York City. The discussion is comparative in nature, discussing the situation of Mexican New Yorkers relative to other major racial and ethnic groups in New York City. But there is a salient issue to consider on this regard. Well-being is a relative concept [see Frank (1987)]. For immigrant populations especially, it is not clear whether the basis for standard of living and poverty comparisons should be the host country where the immigrants arrive at or the source country where the migrants come from.

For many Mexican migrants in New York City, the basis of comparison for their own standard of living is not the rest of the City's population but rather the community south of the border where they come from. From this perspective, the income earned in New York, even if very low by U.S. standards, can represent an enormous leap compared to the situation they would have faced in Mexico. In 2000, the per-capita income of the average household in the state of Puebla was approximately $4,133 per year, adjusted for differences in purchasing power between the United States and Mexico. This would be about 40 percent of the income per-capita of the average Mexican household in New York City. But as noted earlier, most Mexican migrants in New York come from low-income rural communities. In these communities, where agriculture and farming predominate as economic activities, income per-capita could be as low as 20 percent of the average for the overall population [INEGI, 1996, Table 4.5, part 1]. For the rural communities of Puebla, this would amount to about $827 per year. This constitutes a small fraction of the income per-capita of the average Mexican household in New York. As a result, the remittances sent by Mexican migrants in New York back to their places of origin constitute a major contribution to the Mexican economy [see de la Garza and Orozco (2002)].

The large gaps between standards of living in Mexico and the U.S. provide some perspective on why large numbers of Mexican migrants continue to move to New York City despite their comparatively low income-per-capita by U.S. standards. But the issue should not be over-emphasized either. It is important to remember that the indicators quoted for income and poverty above (mean or median values) are measures of the middle of the distribution. This implies that there are significant proportions of the population with incomes well above and well below these levels. By definition, half of all Mexican New Yorkers have per-capita income below the median of $10,231 noted in Table 12. For those migrants at the bottom of the income

distribution, the social and economic experience in New York City does not coincide with the optimistic expectations before they entered the country. Often, the travails that many migrants suffer in the City, seeking employment opportunities that no longer exist or are not realized, do not compensate for the high economic and personal costs of the movement to New York.

It is also essential to remember that New York will likely be the place where many of the Mexicans residing in New York today will live for a long time, perhaps the rest of their lives. Despite the expectations that migrants have that they will return home, the reality is that many of them will stay in the City, for a wide array of economic and non-economic reasons. It is therefore eminently relevant to compare the socioeconomic status of the Mexican resident population of New York with that of other groups living in the city.

6. Mexicans in the New York City Labor Market

What factors explain the comparatively low income of Mexicans in New York compared to other racial and ethnic groups? A wide variety of social, political and economic forces affect income and poverty. But since income is largely derived from employment, discussions on the topic inevitably end-up focusing on labor market outcomes. This section begins by examining labor force participation, then moving to unemployment, industrial distribution, occupational concentration, and earnings.

Labor force participation rates measure the proportion of persons 16 years of age or older who participate in the labor market, including those who are employed as well as those who are unemployed but are actively seeking employment. Persons out of the labor force, on the other hand, may be working at home (as, for example, unpaid family workers), enrolled in school, retired, or may be discouraged workers, that is, workers who dropped out of the labor force, quitting after failing to find employment opportunities through an extended search effort.

Table 13

Labor Force Participation Rates in New York City, 2000
Persons 16 years of age or older

Population Group	Labor Force Participation Rate (%) Male	Female
Mexican Population	73.9%	45.3%
New York City overall	66.9	53.5
Non-Hispanic White	69.3	54.5
Non-Hispanic Black/African American	62.8	57.2
Non-Hispanic Asian	70.3	53.7
Hispanic/Latino Population	64.2	48.3

Source: Author's tabulations, 2000 U.S. Census of Population 5% Public Use Microdata Sample.

Table 13 presents labor force participation rates for New York City in 2000, decomposed by race/ethnicity and gender. For Mexican men, the labor force participation rate is approximately 74 percent, which is substantially higher than that for New York City overall, equal to 66.9 percent. On the other hand, the proportion of Mexican women participating in the labor force is 45.3 percent, quite below the 53.5 percent prevailing among the overall female population in the City. In fact, the Mexican female labor force participation rate is the lowest among all the major racial and ethnic groups in New York, including the overall Hispanic labor force participation rate, which is 48.3 percent.

The below-average labor force participation of Mexican women in New York is directly connected to the large share of immigrants in the Mexican population: among women born in the U.S., the labor force participation rate is 56 percent, which sharply exceeds the New York City

average. The opposite holds for Mexican New Yorkers born outside the United States: in this group, female labor force participation is just 41.6 percent.

Although below the average by New York City (and U.S.) standards, the labor force participation rate of Mexican-born women residing in New York is significantly higher than that in Mexico itself. Mexican female labor force participation rates are sharply lower than in the U.S. In 1995, for example, 35.1 percent of women participated in the labor market in Mexico. In the state of Puebla, the average female labor force participation rate was 35.9 percent. And the data provided by the Mexican Migration Project indicate that the female labor force participation rate in the rural communities of Puebla, where a substantial fraction of New York City migrants come from, is even lower, equal to 14 percent, on average. In comparison to these numbers, the participation of Mexican-born women in the New York labor force is very high indeed.

Table 14 displays the proportion of the labor force that was unemployed in the week before Census questionnaires were filled-out in April 2000. The data are presented for various

Table 14
Unemployment Rates in New York City, 2000
Persons 16 years of age or older

Population Group	Unemployment Rate (%)		
	Overall	Male	Female
Mexican Population	6.4%	4.8%	10.2%
New York City overall	6.0	5.5	6.5
Non-Hispanic White	3.3	3.2	3.4
Non-Hispanic Black/African American	8.9	9.4	8.6
Non-Hispanic Asian	4.3	3.8	4.9
Hispanic/Latino	9.0	7.5	10.9

Source: Author's tabulations, 2000 U.S. Census of Population 5% Public Use Microdata Sample.

ethnic and racial groups in New York City and disaggregated by gender. The unemployment rate among the Mexican population, which was equal to 6.4 percent, was about the same as that for the overall New York City labor force, which was equal to 6.0 percent. As in the case of labor force participation rates, however, there are substantial differences on the basis of gender. The Mexican male unemployment rate is significantly below the City average but the female rate is substantially higher. Among Mexican men, the unemployment rate in 2000 was 4.8 percent while for women the rate was more than twice, equal to 10.2 percent. Note also that, by comparison with other Hispanic/Latino workers, Mexican men have a much lower unemployment rate, but Mexican women have about the same unemployment rate as the overall Hispanic/Latino female workforce.

What explains the substantially lower unemployment rates of male Mexican workers compared to other Latinos/Hispanics and most of the labor force in New York? There are a number of personal characteristics that influence unemployment rates, such as educational attainment (the lower the educational attainment, the higher the likelihood of unemployment), English language proficiency (the lower the proficiency, the greater the likelihood of unemployment), migration status (the more recent the migrant, the higher the likelihood of unemployment), the age of the person (the younger the worker, the higher the unemployment), and health disability (if the person has some health disability, the unemployment rate is much higher). None of these factors, however, explains the lower unemployment propensity of male Mexican workers since they tend to be younger, have less schooling, lower levels of English proficiency, etc.

Instead, the low unemployment among Mexican men in New York is more closely aligned with the fact that they fill a niche among the unskilled labor force that other workers do not fill. This labor market niche, which facilitates their employment, is connected to the already-discussed migration networks that make New York City the destination of migrants from specific parts of Mexico. It is a social and economic networking that characterizes other recent immigrant movements to urban areas as well. As sociologists Roger Waldinger and Claudia Der-

Martirosian, at the University of California at Los Angeles, describe it: “Immigrants tend to cluster in activities in which others of their own kind are already established. Initial placements...may be affected by any range of factors –prior experience, cultural preferences or historical accident. But once the initial settlers have established a beachhead, subsequent arrivals tend to follow behind, preferring an environment in which at least some faces are familiar and discovering that personal contacts prove the most efficient means of finding a job. More important, the predilections of immigrants match the preferences of employers, who try to reproduce the characteristics of the workers they already have. Managers appreciate network recruitment for its ability to attract applicants quickly and at low cost; they value it even more for its efficiency. Hiring through connections upgrades the quality of information, reducing the risks entailed in acquiring new personnel; since sponsor usually have a stake in their job, they can also be relied on to keep the referrals in line” [Waldinger and Der-Martirosian (2001), p. 236].

In New York City, labor market networking has led Mexican men to fill some highly unskilled job niches left open over the last 15 years by the rest of the population, whose educational attainment has risen through time, qualifying them for higher-skilled employment. In 2000, only 4 percent of the New York City labor force had received 6 years of schooling or less. The great majority of these unskilled laborers were born outside the United States. Indeed, as much as 85.4 percent of the New York City labor force with 6 or less years of schooling was born outside the country. A significant number of these workers were Mexican.

Mexican men are employed in a wide array of occupations and industries in New York. However, there are several niches that present clusters of employment. Table 15 presents the industrial composition of the labor force, for the overall City workforce as well as for Mexican New Yorkers. The data reflect the sector of employment of persons in the labor force in 2000. For persons employed, this is their actual employment at the time they filled out their Census questionnaires in 2000. For unemployed persons, it represents the industry of their last job.

Table 15

Industrial Distribution of the Labor Force in New York City, 2000

Persons 16 years of age or older

Industry	Male		Female	
	New York	Mexican	New York	Mexican
Agriculture, Forestry and Mining	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
Construction	7.5	10.6	0.8	0.7
Manufacturing	7.1	11.9	6.2	22.1
Transportation, Communications and Public Utilities	9.7	4.1	3.0	2.1
Wholesale Trade	3.9	4.7	2.3	3.5
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	12.0	3.4	10.7	5.4
Professional, Technical Services	12.2	5.4	11.7	8.8
Education, Health, Social Services	12.6	3.0	35.0	15.7
Food/Entertainment/Other Services	15.1	39.8	12.7	26.1
Public Administration	4.6	0.7	4.3	1.5

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

There are three sectors that stand out in terms of the male Mexican labor force: construction, manufacturing, and the food/entertainment sector. Over 60 percent of Mexican men are employed in these three sectors. By comparison, the proportion of the New York City labor force in these sectors is less than 30 percent. More specifically, the food services and food retail trade industries of New York City (including restaurants, grocery stores, etc.) serve as special niches for Mexican men. As much as 42 percent of all Mexican men in the New York City labor force are employed in the food services and food retail trade industries alone.

There are no equivalent niches for Mexican women in the New York City labor market. One sector that has employed Mexican women in large numbers is manufacturing. But the manufacturing sector has been contracting in New York City for many years, leaving an uncountable number of unemployed workers [Orr (1997)].

The occupational distribution of the Mexican labor force follows the industrial specialization just described. Table 16 shows that the Mexican labor force is concentrated in two sets of occupations: services, and production, transport and moving occupations. Both for men and women, these two sets of occupations account for over 50 percent of the labor force. And following the niche carved by Mexican men in the New York City food industry, food-related occupations offer a major share of employment, particularly among men. Mexicans now form a significant part of the labor force in some of the food preparation and food serving occupations. For example, among men employed as cooks and food preparation workers, Mexicans constitute close to 20 percent of all workers employed in New York City.

The immigrant networking and labor market specialization of Mexican men within the New York City industrial and occupational structures explain to a large extent the comparatively low unemployment rates of Mexican men. The absence of specific labor market niches, except for the manufacturing sector, explains as well the higher unemployment rate of Mexican women in New York. The relative unemployment rates of Mexican men and women, on the other hand, also have their own implications. For one, they help understand the higher labor force

Table 16

Occupational Distribution of the Labor Force in New York City
Persons 16 years of age or older

Occupation	Male		Female	
	New York	Mexican	New York	Mexican
Managerial and Professional	33.9%	9.0%	40.0%	16.5%
Technical, Sales and Administrative Support	21.4	15.1	20.0	33.6
Service Workers	17.3	37.9	33.7	24.8
Farming, Forestry and Fishing	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.1
Construction, Extraction and Maintenance	11.8	13.4	0.4	0.7
Production, Transport and Material Moving	15.5	24.3	5.8	24.3

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

participation rates of men and the lower rates for women. As unemployment rates increase, workers become discouraged in their job search, inducing some of them to leave the labor force, even if temporarily. To some extent, then, the comparatively higher unemployment rates of Mexican women in New York City lie behind their lower labor force participation rates. Similarly, the economic incentives provided by low unemployment rates among Mexican men partly explain their higher labor force participation rates.

The discussion so far has shown that, overall, Mexican labor market performance is about the average for New York City and it cannot therefore be used to explain the comparatively low per-capita income obtained by this population. Although labor force participation rates for

Mexican women are somewhat below the average and unemployment rates are relatively high, male labor force participation rates exceed the average and unemployment rates are among the lowest for the City. The analysis has also shown, however, that the Mexican occupational distribution of both men and women is concentrated in low-skilled occupations. This suggests that the earnings of most Mexican workers in New York are likely to be at the lower tail of the salary distribution. And this is the key factor explaining the low income prevailing in this group.

Table 17 presents the median annual earnings of Mexican New Yorkers in 1999, compared with those of other groups of workers in the population. As can be seen, the annual earnings of Mexican men and women were the lowest of all the racial and ethnic groups examined. For Mexican men, the median annual earnings in 1999 were equal to $11,731, about half of those of the overall New York City male worker population, whose median earnings were $29,155 in 1999. Among Mexican women, the annual earnings of $13,250 in 1999 were less than half those for women overall, whose earnings were $24,469.

Table 17

The Annual Earnings of Workers in New York City, 1999
Employed persons 16 years of age or older

Population Group	Median Annual Earnings (1999) Male	Female
Mexican	$15,631	$11,731
New York City	29,155	24,469
Non-Hispanic White	41,717	31,488
Non-Hispanic Black/African American	26,220	24,882
Non-Hispanic Asian	22,943	20,800
Hispanic/Latino	20,938	16,300

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

7. The Determinants of Earnings: Age, Education and Discrimination

The wide gap in earnings between Mexican laborers and the average worker in New York City helps explain the huge socioeconomic disparity described earlier. But this leads to a further question: what are the factors that determine the sharply lower earnings of Mexican New Yorkers? The extensive literature on the determinants of earnings suggests that age, educational attainment, English language proficiency, immigration status and labor market discrimination, among other factors, are associated with lower earnings. This section focuses on issues connected to age and education.

Age Structure

The age structure of a population makes a significant difference in terms of salaries: except for the very old, as workers age, their labor market experience is rewarded with increased earnings. As a result, if the average age of a population is less than that of other groups, its average income may be lower.

Table 18 shows the overall connection between age and earnings in New York City. The annual wages and salaries of full-time workers increase sharply as they get older. For the labor force aged 16 to 19 years of age, annual earnings in 1999 were equal to $19,576. This rises to $27,476 for workers aged 20 to 24 years of age. For the age group 25 to 34, earnings increase to $50,694. And so on for older age groups. Only when workers reach the 55 to 64 years of age bracket does their income slightly decline compared to younger cohorts.

The Mexican population in New York City is very young. As shown earlier, its median age in the year 2000 was 24.3 years, drastically lower than that of the overall New York City population, which was 34.4 years. As a result, a large portion of the Mexican labor force is in the age range that receives the lowest wages in the City. As a matter of fact, 23 percent of the New York City labor force in the 16 to 19 years of age range consists of Mexican workers.

Table 18

Age and the Annual Earnings of Workers in New York City, 1999

Employed persons 16 years of age or older with positive earnings

Age Group	Average Annual Earnings (1999)
16 to 19	$19,576
20 to 24	27,476
25 to 34	50,694
35 to 44	61,653
45 to 54	62,545
55 to 64	61,998

Source: Author's tabulations, 2000 U.S. Census of Population 1% Public Use Microdata Sample.

Schooling and Educational Attainment

The demographic tilt of the Mexican population towards younger age groups explains the large share of Mexicans among workers aged 16 to 19. But it does not explain why these teenagers are in the labor force instead of continuing their school studies, as most other teenagers in the City do. Table 19 presents school enrollment rates for the Mexican population of New York in 2000. These rates remain high for children up to 14 years of age, but they drop sharply for older teenagers, especially in comparison with the overall New York City student population.

Table 19
School Enrollment Rates of Mexican New Yorkers, Aged 5-19

Age Group	Proportion of Children in Age Group Enrolled in School			
	New York		Mexican	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
5-9 Years	96.7%	96.8%	94.6%	95.2%
10-14 Years	98.5	98.6	95.2	95.9
15-17 Years	93.8	95.0	62.2	70.7
18-19 Years	67.6	71.2	25.0	31.1

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

For Mexican children aged 14-17 years, the school enrollment rates are 62.2 percent for males and 70.7 percent for females. These are sharply lower than those for the overall New York City population aged 14-17, which has enrollment rates equal to 93.8 percent for males and 95 percent for females. The enrollment gap widens for teenagers aged 18 and 19. For New York City overall, the male enrollment rate in this age group is 67.6 percent and for females it is 71.2 percent. But among Mexican teenagers, the corresponding figures are 25 and 31.1 percent.

The sharply lower school enrollment rates of Mexican youth after age 14 are partly the outcome of the pressures these youngsters face in raising income for their families. In his account of the life of the Mexican worker Eduardo Gutierrez, who died tragically while at work in a New York City construction site in 1999, Jimmy Breslin poignantly describes the situation of a Mexican youngster applying for employment in a local coffee shop: “Why don’t you go to school? Angelo, the owner, asked Jose, fourteen, when he presented himself for a job in the Elite Coffee Shop on Columbus Avenue. Jose asked, “Is the school going to pay me?” Angelo

shrugged and he motioned the kid to the kitchen, where he would still be ten years later." [Breslin (2002), p. 128].

The combination of low high school retention rates among Mexican teenagers in the U.S. with low levels of schooling among adult Mexican immigrants means that, of all the major racial and ethnic groups listed in New York City, the Mexican population has by far the lowest educational attainment. Table 20 presents the educational outcomes of the Mexican population in New York City in 2000, compared to the overall city population. Note that of all the racial and ethnic groups listed in Table 20, by far, the Mexican population had the highest proportion of persons who had not completed high school. Close to 60 percent of the Mexican New Yorkers with 25 years of age or older had not completed high school. By comparison, less than 30

Table 20

The Educational Status of the Population in New York City, 2000
Persons 25 years of age or older

Population Group	Percentage of the Population with: Less than High School	High School Diploma	More Than High School
Mexican	59.4%	21.7%	18.9%
New York City	27.7	24.4	47.9
Non-Hispanic White	15.3	23.9	60.8
Non-Hispanic Black/ African American	28.7	28.6	42.7
Non-Hispanic Asian	30.5	18.5	50.9
Hispanic	46.6	23.4	30.0

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, Summary File 4.

percent of the overall New York City population with 25 years of age or older had not completed high school.. In terms of college education, 18.9 percent of Mexican New Yorkers had attended post-secondary education but only 9.1 percent had completed a college degree, compared with 47.9 percent and 27.4 percent, respectively, for the overall New York City population. Even among the Hispanic/Latino population, Mexican New Yorkers had lower educational attainment.

The low schooling of the Mexican workforce has severe income consequences. There is a strong positive correlation between the earnings workers receive in the labor market and educational attainment. Higher schooling raises worker productivity and leads to increased earnings. Education is also used by employers as a screening device, with less-educated workers out-ranked by more-educated workers in the rationing of entry-level jobs and higher-paying promotions.

This is graphically illustrated in Table 21, which shows the annual wage and salary income of full-time, year-round workers in New York City in 1999. The average earnings of these workers were $56,473. But for workers who had completed less than a high school education (only elementary and/or middle school), their annual earnings were $25,306. For persons with a high school diploma or equivalent, the income rises to $36,161. And for those with a college degree, annual earnings were equal to $70,564.

The abysmal gap between the educational attainment of Mexicans and that of other ethnic and racial groups in New York City lies behind their drastically lower earnings and, consequently, lower per-capita income of this population. This is compounded by the fact that a large proportion of the population has not yet acquired the English language proficiency skills required by higher-paying jobs. In response to the Census question asking whether the person knew how to speak English, 46.2 percent of the Mexican population in New York (5 years of age or older) answered “not well” or “not at all.” Among Mexicans born outside the United States, the proportion was much higher, equal to 57 percent.

Table 20

The Economic Returns to Education in New York City, 1999

Average Annual Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, 16 years of age or older

Educational Attainment	1999 Annual Earnings
Elementary/Middle School	$25,306
Some High School	29,871
High School Diploma or Equivalent	36,161
Some College	45,261
College Degree	70,564
More than College	100,754

Source: 2000 U.S. Census of Population, 5% Public Use Microdata Sample.

Undocumented Workers and Labor Market Discrimination

Although differences in age, education and other variables can explain a substantial portion of the gaps in earnings among different groups of workers in the population, often they cannot account for all of them. The presence of labor market discrimination can explain some of the remaining wage differentials. Studies documenting discrimination against specific ethnic and racial minorities, including Hispanics/Latinos, have proliferated over the years [see, for example, Cross et. al. (1990), Wilson (1997, chapter 5), and Bertrand and Mulainathan (2002)].

In the case of the Mexican population of New York, however, there is a further issue connected to the undocumented status of many workers. The question is the extent to which these workers are exploited, or discriminated against, because of their undocumented status, by being paid wages that are substantially below those paid to legal workers with identical characteristics.

The widespread exploitation of illegal immigrants has been documented in court cases, by the press, and in some academic studies as well. For instance, data for undocumented workers applying for legalization under the 1986 IRCA, suggests that "differences in the measured human capital, occupational, and demographic characteristics of legal and illegal immigrants -- such as the lower educational attainment of illegals, their more limited knowledge of spoken English, and their shorter time of residence in the U.S.-- do not explain most of the observed wage gap between the two groups, whether for males or females. The large proportion of the gap in wages between legal and illegal immigrants unexplained by differences in the measured characteristics of these two groups strongly suggests the presence of systematic discrimination against undocumented workers" [Rivera-Batiz (1999); see also Rivera-Batiz (2000, 2001)].

There is substantial direct evidence of the abuse and exploitation that many undocumented workers suffer in New York City labor markets. For example, in a detailed 1995 exposé of sweatshops in New York City, the *New York Times* concluded that "Sweatshops...are flourishing...nearly 2,000 sweatshops operate openly throughout New York City...They generally employ 20 to 50 workers, many of them illegal immigrants, willing to suffer long hours, low pay and miserable working conditions just to have a job" [Finder (1995), p. B4]. Similarly, economists Abel Valenzuela and Edwin Melendez find that, despite the fact that day laborers in New York (a large fraction of whom are Mexican undocumented workers) are generally paid above the minimum wage, the work is "difficult, irregular, and often dangerous...day laborers are routinely abused at the workplace. A full 85 percent of all day laborers report at least one type of abuse including paying less than the agreed upon amount, abandoned at the worksite, bad checks in the form of payment, no breaks or water at the worksite, robbery, and threats" [Valenzuela and Melendez (2003), p. 2].

8. Looking Forward

This report has presented information gathered by the U.S. Census of Population. Although released over the last few months, the data was collected in the year 2000. There have been significant changes since that time. The New York City economy continued to grow rapidly until mid-2001, causing a further reduction of the unemployment rate prevailing in early 2000, which hovered above 6 percent. On May 2001, the city had achieved a 4.9 percent unemployment rate, the lowest rate since 1988. Since then, however, unemployment has steadily climbed. Both the economy-wide recession and the after-effects of September 11th led to a collapse of the earlier boom. Just in the months of October and November 2001, New York City lost close to one hundred thousand jobs. By early 2003, the unemployment rate had climbed to around 9 percent.

There is no comprehensive data available yet to determine the impact of these events on the Mexican population. Judging by the effects of the last recession in the early 1990s, however, the impact of the current economic slump will be magnified among those with low skills. Indeed, the brunt of the short-term adjustments made by many service, transportation and commerce sectors in New York after September 11th were borne by relatively unskilled laborers. A study released in November 2001 showed that the top 7 occupations affected by the recession after September 11th included: waiters and waitresses, cleaning and maintenance workers, retail sales persons, food preparation workers, cashiers, housekeeping workers, and fast food servers (as reported by Eaton and Wyatt, 2001). This was followed by smaller losses in more-skilled occupations, such as general managers, top executives, sales supervisors and service supervisors. Given the labor market niche of Mexicans in New York, which targets low-skilled jobs in the food industry, manufacturing and construction, one can predict that the impact of the economic developments over the last two years has been serious.

Still, even though the short-term economic situation does not appear promising, it is clear that once the reconstruction of the World Trade Center site begins and the recovery of the American economy from its current sluggish conditions occur, employment and income

prospects can reverse their current trends.

9. Conclusions

Using data from the 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing released in recent months, complemented with other U.S. and Mexican data sources, this research report has provided a detailed profile of the demographic, social and economic condition of Mexicans in the City of New York. The following conclusions stand out.

Demographics

Mexicans had the highest rate of population growth of the major racial and ethnic groups in the City in the 1990s. The number of Mexican New Yorkers counted by the U.S. Census rose to 186,872 in 2000, making Mexicans the third largest Hispanic/Latino population in New York, after Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. Among all cities in the United States, New York City is now ranked No. 11 in terms of the size of its Mexican population, following cities with long-standing Mexican communities, such as San Diego, Santa Ana and San Jose, California.

The growth of the Mexican population of New York has been fueled by immigration. Among Mexican New Yorkers, 77.6 percent were born outside the United States. A substantial fraction of these migrants are undocumented workers. Although uncertain by their very nature, Census-based estimates of undocumented Mexican immigrants residing in New York place that population at between 20 and 40 percent of all Mexican immigrants residing in New York City.

But it is likely that the data provided by the 2000 Census reflect a serious undercount of the total Mexican population living in New York City, particularly the immigrant population. Although extensive efforts were made by Census officials to reach minority populations, there is still a significant undercount in the hard-to-reach urban neighborhoods where many recent Mexican residents of New York live. In addition, the Census generally fails to count temporary migrants, whose “usual residence” is not the United States and are not, therefore, considered by Census takers to be part of the U.S. resident population. Estimates provided by close observers and researchers of the Mexican population living in New York place that population (including

both residents and temporary migrants) at levels substantially above 200,000, closer to -- or even above-- the 275,000-300,000 range.

The place of origin of most Mexican immigrants in New York is the State of Puebla. Estimates are that between 60 and 80 percent of all Mexican migrants in New York City originate in Puebla or in other States in the vicinity of Puebla, including Guerrero, Jalisco, and Michoacan . Most of these migrants come from low-income, rural communities within these States.

Income and Poverty

The household income per person of the Mexican population is among the lowest of the major racial and ethnic groups of New York City. The mean annual household income per-capita of the Mexican population of New York in 1999 was $10,231, which is less than half of that prevailing among the overall New York City population, equal to $22,402 in 1999. This income is lower than the average for Hispanics/Latinos and significantly lower than that prevailing in the Black/African American and Asian populations.

The poverty rate of Mexican New Yorkers is among the highest of the major racial and ethnic groups in the City. One third (33 percent) of all Mexicans in the city had a household income below the poverty line in 1999. This compares to 21.2 percent among the overall New York City population, 11.5 percent among White New Yorkers, 25 percent for Black/African Americans, 19.6 percent for Asian New Yorkers and 30.8 percent for Hispanics/Latinos overall.

These figures, however, must be carefully interpreted. For many Mexican migrants, the basis of comparison for their standard of living is the community south of the border where they come from, not the United States. From this perspective, the income received by a large number of migrants in New York represents an enormous leap, compared to the situation they would have faced in Mexico. Average household income in the state of Puebla in Mexico is about 40 percent of that received by the average Mexican household in New York. And in the rural communities of Puebla, where many Mexican New Yorkers originate, the average income per capita may be as low as $800 per year, which is a small fraction of the average annual income

per-capita in New York.

Employment and Earnings

Both the labor force participation rate and unemployment rate facing Mexican New Yorkers in general are about the average for New York City. But there are wide gaps between men and women. Mexican men have higher rates of labor force participation relative to the City average and Mexican women have lower labor force participation rates. Unemployment rates also diverge by gender: Mexican men have lower unemployment rates than the City average and women have higher unemployment rates.

Low labor market earnings are key in explaining the low income-per-capita of the Mexican population, by New York City or United States standards. The median annual earnings of male Mexican workers in New York City were $15,631 in 1999, about half of what the median worker in the City received, which was $29,155. For Mexican women, the median earnings in 1999 were $11,731, compared to $24,469 among the overall New York City labor force.

One of the reasons behind the low earnings received by Mexican workers is the young age of these laborers. As workers become older and gain experience, their earnings generally rise. In New York City, the average annual earnings of workers aged 16 to 19 are about one-third of the earnings of workers aged 35 to 44. But a large portion of the Mexican labor force is precisely in the age range receiving the lowest wages in the City. This causes the earnings of the Mexican labor force to drop relative to those of other, older, racial and ethnic groups.

Because most New York City teenagers remain out of the labor force, Mexican youth account for a substantial proportion of the city's youngest workers. Indeed, as much as 23 percent of the New York City labor force in the 16 to 19 age range consists of Mexican workers.

Educational Attainment

The other side of the coin of the high labor force participation rates of Mexican youth is low retention rates in school. The school enrollment rates for the Mexican population of New

York remain high for children up to 14 years of age, but they drop sharply for older teenagers, especially in comparison with the overall New York City student population. For Mexican children aged 14-17 years, the school enrollment rates in 2000 were 62.2 percent for males and 70.7 percent for females. These are sharply lower than those for the overall New York City population aged 14-17, equal to 93.8 percent for males and 95 percent for females. The enrollment gap widens for teenagers aged 18 and 19. For New York City overall, the enrollment rate of males in this age group is 67.6 percent and for females it is 71.2 percent. But among Mexican teenagers the corresponding figures are 25 and 31.1 percent.

The combination of low high school retention rates among Mexican youth residing in New York, combined with an immigrant adult population that has also low educational attainment, results in the fact that, of all the major racial and ethnic groups listed in New York City, the Mexican population has by far the lowest schooling. Close to 60 percent of Mexican New Yorkers with 25 years of age or older had not completed high school in the year 2000. By comparison, less than 30 percent of the overall New York City population with 25 years of age or older had not completed high school. Even among the Hispanic/Latino population, Mexican New Yorkers had lower educational attainment.

A corollary of low educational attainment is the large share of Mexican workers employed in highly unskilled jobs. For men, the service sector, manufacturing and construction dominate, with 70 percent of Mexican workers employed in these three industries, as compared to 29.7 percent among the overall New York workforce. For women, the service sector and manufacturing are the major sectors of employment, with 63.9 percent of all Mexican women in the labor force employed in these two sectors. Within the service sector, Mexican men have a special niche in the food services and food retail industries: as much as 42 percent of all Mexican male workers in New York are employed in these industries. In some jobs in this industry, the Mexican presence is palpable: as much as 20 percent of all men employed as cooks and food preparation workers in New York are Mexican.

Public Policy Implications

The data presented in this report suggest that to improve the long-term social and economic condition of Mexican New Yorkers, education must be the first priority. For the adult immigrant Mexican population, most of which is still a young adult population, the key policy instruments involve adult literacy, English language proficiency, and programs that combine work with schooling. The role played by hometown community development organizations on this regard may be critical, not only because of their access to the Mexican population but also because of their visibility and influence among Mexican New Yorkers [Rivera-Sanchez (2002)].

One of the barriers facing educational programs targeting immigrants is the prevailing perception by many immigrants that they will return home in the near future [see Cortina and Gendreau (2001)]. Since they wish to maximize labor market earnings, setting aside time for learning English or acquiring more schooling has a high, perceived opportunity cost. But in many cases, the hope for return migration is delayed for extended periods of time, maybe even permanently. For these workers, not investing in educational skills has a sharp negative impact on their future income in the United States. Reaching such populations and offering educational choices is a task that community organizations can contribute enormously.

The comparatively low high school retention rate of Mexican teenagers is a second issue of concern. This is a nationwide problem among Latino youth. A number of reasons have been postulated for this phenomenon. The lower socioeconomic status of Latino families means that children do not have the same home-based financial and human resources that children from families with higher income have [Brooks-Gunn (1996), and Corcoran (2001)]. School resources are also an issue, as children in low-income neighborhoods become segregated into school districts and schools that face lower expenditures per student, as compared to schools in higher-income neighborhoods [Burtless (1996), Rothstein (2001), and Logan (2002)]. This results in lower-quality physical and human school resources, reduced availability of summer school and other supplemental programs, inadequate programs for English language learners, etc. [Kozol (1991)]. But family and school characteristics are not the whole story. Societal, neighborhood and peer-group effects can deeply influence school achievement and retention [Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) and Rivera-Batiz (1996)]. The literature on the schooling of immigrant children paradoxically finds that, the longer they stay in the United States, the lower

the schooling achievement and retention [Rumbaut (1995),]. As Harvard educators, Carola and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco observe: “Immigrant children who find themselves structurally marginalized and culturally disparaged are more likely to respond to these challenges to their identities by developing an adversarial style of adaptation. These children of immigrants are responding in similar ways to that of other marginalized youth in the United States” [Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001, p. 107)]. These responses may differ by gender and may account for the higher school retention rates of females relative to males among Mexican teenagers as well as other Latino/Hispanic groups [Smith (2002)].

In terms of public policy, the issue of equity in school finance is a serious one for urban children. In New York City, efforts to increase school spending per student relative to other school districts in the state have been ongoing for a number of years [Duncombe and Yinger (2001)]. There are also a variety of school reform efforts, ranging from systemic changes in school governance and management, to specific, school-based curricular and instructional approaches that have been shown to have had success in improving the student outcomes of at-risk children, including school-based management, pre-school and after-school initiatives, accelerated school programs, summer school programs, school-to-work initiatives, and strategies to reduce school overcrowding, among others [see Chase and Levin (1995), Currie and Thomas (1995), Ferguson (1998), Fliegel and MacGuire (1993), Gershberg (2001), Entwisle et. al. (2000), Mediratta and Fruchter (2003), and Rivera-Batiz (2003b),]. In terms of parental, community and peer-group effects on schooling, there is some literature suggesting that interventions by community organizations can have a significant input in providing a supportive neighborhood environment [Stone and Wehlage (1996), and Zhou (2001)]. It is a matter for policymakers, however, to rearrange priorities, emphasizing strategies that have been found to be successful and staying away from policies that have questionable value.

Efforts to increase educational attainment may be particularly urgent for Mexican women. The unskilled female labor market in New York City has been sluggish for years, offering reduced employment opportunities. Sectors within the construction or even the food service industry where many male Mexican immigrants have found a niche are not as open for female employment. On the other hand, manufacturing, where a large fraction of unskilled

immigrant women have found jobs in recent years, continues to decline in New York City. As a result, women with lower levels of schooling face substantially higher unemployment rates –and lower earnings—than men with equal levels of education The difficult conditions faced by women in unskilled labor markets make education even more essential for their economic progress in New York.

The young age of the Mexican labor force and its comparatively low level of schooling limit earnings opportunities. But the presence of labor market discrimination and the widespread exploitation and abuse of undocumented workers also affect earnings and working conditions. A number of journalistic accounts and academic studies have documented the difficult employment situation of unskilled undocumented workers. There is also a proliferation of legal cases and administrative complaints involving a variety of employment irregularities facing these workers, from non-payment of wages to dangerous workplaces.

As a consequence, one of the policy areas with an immediate impact on the standard of living of the Mexican workforce in New York is the increased enforcement of labor laws. Substantial progress has been reached on this account in New York State. After a tenacious effort by a coalition of immigrant, community and legal organizations, the New York State legislature passed --and on September 1997 New York State Governor George Pataki signed– the Unpaid Wages Prohibition Act, which constitutes the most stringent wage enforcement law in the United States [Gordon (1999)]. This has been complemented in recent years by an affirmative prosecutorial effort by New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, whose office has successfully prosecuted a number of cases of abuse against undocumented workers and has worked with the employers of Mexican workers –such as Korean grocery store owners– in establishing a code of conduct which will diminish future abuses.

These efforts need to be continued and reinforced because of the ambivalent legal positions at other levels of government. For instance, on March 2002, in a 5 to 4 vote, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that undocumented workers do not have the right to collect back pay in a case where an illegal immigrant was fired because of his efforts to organize a labor union. Although this decision has not reversed the efforts made in a number of states to ensure that labor laws are equally applied to legal and illegal immigrants, it has created as well

an uncertain policy environment.

This research report has provided a detailed statistical profile of the Mexican population of New York City. Behind the statistics, however, lie the real lives of those who, facing uncertain prospects, from enormous success to painful tragedy, continue to come to New York City everyday, in a resilient search to make their dreams a reality. It is hoped that this report will generate a more informed discussion of their struggles, their challenges, and their valuable contributions to New York City.

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